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# Well-being at work

Understand the links between work, health and well-being, and the role of stakeholders in adopting an organisational approach to employee well-being

## Introduction

Fostering employee well-being is good for people and the organisation. Promoting well-being can help prevent stress and create positive working environments where individuals and organisations can thrive. Good health and well-being can be a core enabler of employee engagement and organisational performance.

This factsheet focuses on well-being in the workplace, explaining why it matters, and exploring the relationship between work, health and well-being. We investigate the impact of well-being on employee engagement and productivity, unpack the five domains of our well-being model, and look at the role of different stakeholders in cultivating a healthy workplace.

Explore [our stance on employee health and well-being](#) in more detail, along with actions for Government and recommendations for employers.

## What is well-being at work?

In our [Growing the health and well-being agenda report](#), we show that healthy workplaces help people to flourish and reach their potential. This means creating an environment that actively promotes a state of contentment, benefiting both employees and the organisation.

There's now a much broader understanding and application of holistic health and well-being approaches in many workplaces. However, it's also clear that there's an implementation gap, with many organisations not yet embracing the health and well-being agenda to full effect.

Investing in employee well-being can lead to [increased resilience](#), reduced sickness absence and higher performance and productivity. Put simply - it makes good business sense.

However, well-being initiatives often fall short of their potential because they stand alone, isolated from the everyday business. To gain real benefit, employee well-being priorities must be integrated throughout an organisation, embedded in its culture, leadership and people management.

The people profession is in a unique position to drive forward this agenda, to convince senior managers to make it a priority, and ensure that line managers accept and uphold its importance.

## The relationship between work, health and well-being

In 2008, Professor Dame Carol Black, National Director for Health and Work (a post which no longer exists), published her ground-breaking review of the health of Britain's working-age population. The review proposed three principal objectives at the heart of a new vision for health and work in Britain, which is still relevant today:

1. The prevention of illness and promotion of health and well-being
2. Early intervention for those who develop a health condition
3. Improvement in the health of those out of work - so that everyone with the potential to work has the support they need to do so.

Since then, we've seen an ongoing Government focus on improving the health and well-being of people at work, including a number of initiatives such as the Fit for Work service. Although the occupational health assessment part of the service is no longer available, employers, employees and GPs can still use the Fit for Work website and advice helpline.

## A holistic approach to well-being

The importance of employee health and well-being has become more widely recognised in the UK over the past decade.

While risks to workers' health from physical hazards still exist, fatal and non-fatal injuries to employees have fallen significantly since the introduction of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.

However, there's been a rise in the number of reported mental health issues over the past 10 years, and it's well recognised that in many cases the main risks to people's health at work are psychological. Our Health and well-being at work 2019 survey report, in partnership with Simplyhealth, found that almost two-fifths of organisations had seen an

increase in reported common mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression among employees in the past 12 months. This has led to a growing recognition of the need for employer well-being practices to address the psychosocial, as well as the physical aspects of health and well-being.

The survey report also found evidence of a range of unhealthy working practices such as 'presenteeism' (people working when unwell), with more than four in five respondents observing this type of behaviour among employees. Almost two-thirds of organisations also reported 'leaveism', such as people using their annual leave to catch up on work. This is not the sign of a healthy workplace and employers need to look beyond absence statistics to understand the underlying factors, such as unmanageable workloads, that are driving unhealthy working practices.

Complex changes in the world of work mean that people now face other organisational and wider environmental pressures. Our [UK Working Lives](#) survey found that 55% of employees feel under excessive pressure, or exhausted or regularly miserable at work. This points to an intensification of work for many people.

Employers also need to think carefully about how their well-being strategy builds on, and aligns to, an organisation's [health and safety policies](#).

## The value of employee well-being

Traditionally, when articulating the business case for managing people's health, employers focused on quantifying the negative impact of ill health such as the cost of sickness absence. Recent thinking reflects a more positive business case. PricewaterhouseCoopers research, commissioned by the Health Work Wellbeing Executive, points to 'a wealth of evidence' suggesting a positive link between the introduction of wellness programmes in the workplace and improved [business key performance indicators](#).

Our Health and well-being at work 2019 survey identified the top three benefits of employers increasing their focus on employee well-being:

- better employee morale and engagement
- a healthier and more inclusive culture
- lower sickness absence.

The research shows that health and well-being does not have to be treated as an 'add-on' or 'nice-to-have' activity by organisations – if employers place employee well-being at the centre of their business model and view it as the vital source of value creation, the dividends for organisational health can be significant.

## The CIPD's role in fostering employee well-being

We have set an aspirational agenda for workplace health and well-being. An effective employee well-being programme should be at the core of how an organisation fulfils its mission and carries out its operations, and should not consist of one-off initiatives. It's about changing the way business is done.

An integrated approach to health and well-being:

- benefits employees
- can nurture heightened levels of employee engagement
- fosters a workforce where people are committed to achieving organisational success.

### **Our well-being pyramid model**

## The key domains of well-being

We've identified seven inter-related 'domains' of employee well-being, guided by the principle that an effective employee well-being strategy needs to go far beyond a series of standalone initiatives.

There's no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to designing a health and well-being strategy; its content should be based on the unique needs and characteristics of the organisation and its workforce.

The underlying elements include examples of workplace initiatives and activities to support people's health and well-being.

## Everyone has responsibility for fostering well-being

Adopting an organisational approach to employee well-being carries with it distinct responsibilities for particular employee groups.

### **HR professionals**

HR professionals have a lead role to play in steering the health and well-being agenda in

organisations. They need to ensure that senior managers regard it as a priority and integrate well-being practices into the organisation's day-to-day operations.

They need to communicate the benefits of a healthy workplace to line managers, who are typically responsible for implementing people management and well-being policies. They need to work closely with all areas of the business and provide practical guidance to ensure that policies and practices are implemented consistently and with compassion.

## Senior managers

Lack of senior management commitment to well-being can be a major barrier to implementation. Senior managers are crucial role models, and line managers and employees are more likely to engage with health and well-being interventions if they see senior leaders actively participating in them. Senior managers have the authority and influence to ensure that well-being is a strategic priority embedded in the organisation's day-to-day operations and culture.

## Line managers

Much of the day-to-day responsibility for managing employees' health and well-being falls on line managers. This includes implementing stress management initiatives, spotting early warning signs of stress, making reasonable adjustments at work, and nurturing positive relationships.

Yet our surveys consistently show that 'poor management style' is a main cause of work-related stress. In our Health and well-being at work 2019 survey, an increased proportion of respondents blame management style for stress-related absence (up to 43% from 32% in 2018). Leaders and managers are important role models in fostering healthy behaviour at work, and this finding shows how harmful the impact can be if managers aren't equipped with the competence and confidence to go about their people management role in the right way.

Managers also need to understand the impact their management style has on employees and the wider organisational culture at work.

## Occupational health

Occupational health (OH) is a specialist branch of medicine focused on health in the workplace. For this reason, OH practitioners are likely to work closely with HR practitioners and those responsible for health and safety in a workplace.

## Employees

Employees also have a responsibility for looking after their own health and well-being, and will only benefit from well-being initiatives if they participate in the initiatives on offer and take care of their health and well-being outside work as well. Employers can encourage employees' involvement by communicating how staff can access the support and benefits available to them. It's also important that the organisation seeks employee feedback about its current offering so it can learn how to shape existing initiatives and plan new ones.

## Useful contacts and further reading

### Contacts

[Acas – Health and the workplace](#)

[Health and Safety Executive \(HSE\)](#)

[Council for Work and Health](#)

[NHS Health and Work Network](#)

[Workplace Wellbeing Charter](#)

### Books and reports

COOPER, C. and HESKETH, I. (2019) *Wellbeing at work: how to design, implement and evaluate an effective strategy*. London: Kogan Page and CIPD.

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH AND CARE EXCELLENCE. (2015) *Workplace health: management practices*. NICE guidelines, No NG13. London: NICE.

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH AND CARE EXCELLENCE. (2017) *Healthy workplaces: improving employee mental and physical health and wellbeing*. Quality Standard QS147. Manchester: NICE.

WADDELL, G. and BURTON, A.K. (2006) *Is work good for your health and well-being?* London: Stationery Office

Visit the [CIPD and Kogan Page Bookshop](#) to see all our priced publications currently in print.

### Journal articles

BEVAN, S. and BAJOREK, Z. (2018) Workforce health: Why 'good work' trumps fruit and pilates evangelism every time. *HR Magazine*. October, pp42-44. Reviewed in [In a Nutshell](#),

issue 82.

KIRTON, H. (2017) One in four workers doubt their organisation takes wellbeing seriously. *People Management* (online). 7 July.

SCANIOLA, L. (2017) Financial wellness: why it's a priority now for employers. *Workspan*. Vol 60, no 5, May. pp34-38. Reviewed in *In a Nutshell*, issue 68.

SUFF, R. (2018) We need to watch out for unhealthy behaviour at work. *CIPD Voice*. No 14, June.

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This factsheet was last updated by Rachel Suff.